

**ECC Growth Groups – Term 4, 2014**  
**Behold our God – Study 4: God is Holy (Isaiah 6)**<sup>1</sup>

**Big Idea:** As pictured in Isaiah’s awesome and terrifying vision in the temple, God is a holy God.

**Study Aim:** That group members will: (i) comprehend God’s holiness for themselves; (ii) acknowledge their own unworthiness before God; and (iii) grow in their thankfulness for Christ’s atoning work at the cross.

**Discussion Starter**

At different times the Bible speaks of people relating to God as they would relate to a friend. For example, in Exodus 33 (just before the passage we looked at last week) we read, “*The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend*” (Exodus 33:11). The book of James mentions that Abraham was “*called God’s friend*” (James 2:23). Jesus says to his disciples, “*You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you*” (John 15:14-15). We even sing the song, “*What a friend we have in Jesus*”.

This is a precious truth. However, what are some of the dangers if we only think of God in this way?

**Prayer**

Spend some time praying together before you look at God’s Word.

**Bible Reading**<sup>2</sup>

The book of Isaiah opens with his nation in serious trouble. Uzziah, Judah’s strong king for half a century, was dying. Assyria, the evil empire to the East, was restless and threatening. In Chapter 6, Isaiah receives a vision of God.

Read Isaiah 6:1-7.

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<sup>1</sup> This series of studies is loosely based on the booklet ‘Meeting God’ by J. I. Packer in the *Lifeguide Bible Study* series (1986, IVP).

<sup>2</sup> Please see the comments in Study 3 – Footnote 2 with regards to the importance of placing biblical texts in their context. Hence the brief outline here providing the context of Isaiah.

## Activity

### Option 1

Split into groups of three or four. Provide blank sheets of paper and coloured pencils/textas/crayons. Have each group draw the scene depicted in verses 1-2 of the passage<sup>3</sup>.

Have each group share their drawing with the other groups.

What stood out to you as you sought to capture this scene?

### Option 2

Have the group list each of the descriptions in verse 1 of the vision. Pause at each point and briefly discuss what that particular aspect communicates about God.

*I.e. “seated on a throne”; “high and exalted”; “the train of his robe (i.e. just the bottom part) filled the temple”.*

## Passage Questions

In verse 3 the seraphs<sup>4</sup> call out to each other. What might be the significance of their repetition?

*The three-fold repetition of “holy” has the effect of communicating that God is particularly holy. Motyer states, “Hebrew uses repetition to express superlatives or to indicate totality ... Holiness is supremely the truth about God, and his holiness is in itself so far beyond human thought that a ‘super-superlative’ has to be invented to express it”<sup>5</sup>.*

What effect do their voices have?

*The doorposts and thresholds shake, and the temple is filled with smoke (v 4).*

If this is the effect that *their* voices have, what does that say about the One that they worship?

*The implication is surely that the One they worship must be an incredibly awesome and powerful figure.*

Is this the way you often view God? Why/why not?

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<sup>3</sup> If you are feeling extra adventurous you could even provide various craft supplies and have the groups create a collage of the scene.

<sup>4</sup> The seraphim were heavenly beings associated with the task of guarding the divine throne (‘Seraphim’, *New Bible Dictionary*, p 1077).

<sup>5</sup> J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah – An Introduction and Commentary*, p 77

Why does Isaiah respond in the way he does?

*The holiness of God has been impressed upon him and he realises that both he, and those he lives amongst, are unholy. Hence his outbursts of “Woe to me!” and “I am ruined!” (v 5). Additionally, and connected with themes that we saw in Study 3 from Exodus 33-34, seeing the King, the LORD Almighty, is cause for great fear. One’s very life is at risk (cf Exodus 33:20).*

Do you often feel like Isaiah does here? Why/why not?

Clearly there are significant problems created when a holy God comes into contact with people or things that are unholy. What is the way ahead suggested by the seraph’s actions in verses 6 and 7?

*The seraph takes a live coal from the altar (connected with the temple – the place of sacrifice) and touches Isaiah’s mouth with it (cf “I am a man of unclean lips” – v 5). The seraph promises that Isaiah’s guilt is taken away and his sin atoned for.*

### **Application Questions**

This passage from Isaiah is just one of many in the Bible that reveal to us that God is a holy God. In fact, in the Old Testament the adjective “holy” is attached to God’s name more often than any of the other adjectives put together<sup>6</sup>. Although this is the case, what causes us to forget or minimise this aspect of God’s character?

A French critic of Christianity once said, “The good God will forgive me; that’s his job (or his speciality)”<sup>7</sup>. Why can’t God just forgive our sin?

Read Romans 3:21-26.

How is it possible for us as unholy people to relate to this holy God?

How can we remain filled with awe at God’s holiness and yet also filled with thankfulness for what he has done for us at the cross?

### **Close + Prayer**

See Appendix 1 – ‘Theology to Doxology’ and then close the study with a time of prayer.

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<sup>6</sup> Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, p 77.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in John Stott’s, *The Cross of Christ*, p 87.

## Appendix 1 – Theology to Doxology<sup>8</sup>

For our *'Theology to Doxology'* in this study it is appropriate that we use the classic hymn, *'Holy, holy, holy'*. If you would like to listen to a version online, you can use the URL below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PCnRYj3lMIQ>

If you would like to sing together or simply read out the lyrics, they are included below:

### Verse 1

Holy holy holy  
 Lord God Almighty  
 Early in the morning  
 Our song shall rise to Thee  
 Holy holy holy  
 Merciful and mighty  
 God in three persons  
 Blessed Trinity

### Verse 2

Holy holy holy  
 All the saints adore Thee  
 Casting down their golden crowns  
 Around the glassy sea  
 Cherubim and seraphim  
 Falling down before Thee  
 Who was, and is,  
 And evermore shall be

CCLI Song # 1156  
 John Bacchus Dykes | Reginald Heber  
 © Words: Public Domain  
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### Verse 3

Holy holy holy  
 Though the darkness hide Thee  
 Though the eye of sinful man  
 Thy glory may not see  
 Only Thou art holy  
 There is none beside Thee  
 Perfect in power  
 In love and purity

### Verse 4

Holy holy holy  
 Lord God Almighty  
 All Thy works shall praise Thy name  
 In earth and sky and sea  
 Holy holy holy  
 Merciful and mighty  
 God in three persons  
 Blessed Trinity

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<sup>8</sup> Theology – literally ‘a word of/about God’ is to lead to Doxology – literally ‘a word of praise/glory’. Please see the introductory notes to this section in Study 1 – Appendix 1 if you need to recall the rationale behind its inclusion.